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ABSTRACT

Miami University's summer student exchange program with the Vienna School of Business and World Trade brings together American and Austrian students for six weeks on the Ohio campus. The Austrian students study primarily marketing and management but also English, technical and business writing, foreign languages, history, political science, economics, environmental studies, and sports. They are enrolled as guest auditors in regularly-scheduled classes and also have special activities arranged for them. The university derives a number of benefits from the program, including internationalization of the student body, international good-will, recruitment of future full-time foreign students, and the participation of the Austrian students as German language conversation partners for American students of German. As a result, healthy summer German enrollments have evolved where there were none previously. The Austrian students are given a list of conversation topics and information about potential American partners before their arrival and have some choice in selecting their partners and topics. Students are reassured that they need not be experts on any subject, and are sworn to use only German during the interviews. The Austrian students evaluate their American partners. The program has been well received in its 13 years. (MSE)

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THE AUSTRIAN-AMERICAN TEAMWORK APPROACH TO BUSINESS GERMAN

by

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The Austrian-American Teamwork Approach to Business German

This presentation will outline for you the arrangement currently in operation at Miami University that brings American and Austrian students together for a few weeks in the summer for an educational and cross-cultural experience. The paper does not try to cover all the possibilities in terms of what kinds of mutually beneficial activities might be entered into within the framework of this arrangement. Time will permit only a brief description of the present situation. It is an arrangement that could be applied to other situations in which a group of students from a particular country is on campus for an extended visit.

The push toward internationalism we have been experiencing at Miami is one that comes at least as much from the students as from enlightened faculty. They tend to be more traveled and more aware of the world around them than were their predecessors. This can be gauged by the number of enrollments in international studies, for example, or the number opting for the international business concentration. Language majors are on the increase as well. The business school has begun to respond by offering advanced summer seminars abroad for the first time. These are in great demand. The business faculty and students are becoming aware of the usefulness of a foreign language, particularly the kind that will increase their ability to function in the business world. A larger number of non-business majors are taking general business courses, as has been predicted (and encouraged) by language educators since back in the 70s. Some, in order to accomplish all their educational goals, have attended summer school. This is one of the factors that led to the creation of the teamwork project to be described here, though first it will be necessary to indicate briefly in what capacity the Austrians came to be at Miami.

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Miami University has served as host to over 330 Austrian students in the thirteen years since its first such program brought thirteen participants over in 1974. Most have been students in their first several semesters, but others were pursuing advanced degrees and some had already entered upon a career. Their shared goals in coming to our Southwest Ohio campus have always been the desire to practice English in an academic setting where they can extend their knowledge in their chosen fields, to expand their horizons in other academic areas, and to experience first-hand America and its people.

The fact that they show a slight preference for coursework in business administration has two explanations: on the one hand, the principal recruiting activity for the program has for several years taken place at the Vienna School of Business and World Trade (Wirtschaftsuniversitaet); and on the other, Miami University has a great deal to offer in business, most particularly in the areas of marketing and management. The Austrians also enjoy classwork in English literature, technical and business writing, foreign languages, history, political science, economics, and environmental studies, as well as sailing, golf, and tennis offered by the department of physical education. Indeed, sports and leisure activities afford them a ready access to American students, and most find they have made several friends before leaving campus.

The students are enrolled as guest auditors in regularly scheduled classes during a six-week term that keeps up to 2,000 of our regular students on the main campus from early July to mid-August. The Austrians also take field trips and pleasure outings together, escorted by various faculty, staff, and student volunteers, and they attend a few specially arranged guest lectures on American topics.

The university derives a number of intangible benefits from this arrangement, in the areas of internationalization of the student body, international good-will, and recruitment of future full-time students from abroad. In addition, the Austrian students participate in a German language instruction project. They volunteer to be conversation partners to our students of German enrolled during that same summer term. They also volunteer to be teamed with American roommates in the residence hall to which most Miami summer students are assigned. Thus Miami has been able to tap an obvious but underutilized source of stimulating input. The results appear to have been successful to date, with healthy summer language enrollments where there had been no course offered at all before.
Because the course being offered is a second-semester intermediate German course, and because the Austrians often bring with them language learning experience in both business German and business English, it was decided to make the course one that focuses on business German. The text used is Merrifield's Deutsche Wirtschaftssprache fuer Amerikaner. The conversation topics assigned are often related to the composition exercises provided in the text, though sometimes with adjustments to compensate for the exclusive emphasis the book places on the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Austrians are provided with a list of the topics in advance of their departure for the United States, so that they can prepare themselves mentally for these conversations, which have, at the outset, at least, the nature of an interview. Both the Austrians and Americans are given a list of topics longer than is required for the course, so that it becomes an immediate matter of discussion between them which ones the American is most eager to explore and which ones the Austrian feels most comfortable with: each pair of partners comes up with its selection. The meetings are

scheduled between the participants, usually one per week, for a minimum of five. They may not run shorter than 30 minutes. Many run much longer, the average being about an hour. Among the topics often examined are "Austria and the European Community," "The Economic Importance of X (Hometown or other chosen town or city)," "Concerns About the Environment," "Austria's Forests," "American and Austrian Television Compared," and "Austrian Observations on American Behavior." The Austrian students are encouraged to bring a few short relevant clippings, brochures and pamphlets with them to share with their interlocutors. This also helps them focus on the topics prior to their departure from Europe.

The Austrian students receive a list of the participating Americans with information about their hobbies, study interests, and favorite leisure pursuits, and from this they make their selection of conversation partners. They also discuss together at the outset a few of the topics about which some of them feel less than secure, and this experience turns out to have the function of cementing relationships among members of the visiting group earlier than would otherwise be the case. It is necessary to reassure the participants that they need not be experts on any of the topics. The educated layperson's familiarity with any of them is quite sufficient.

Even after a short period of five or six weeks, the American students are pleased at how much German they have been exposed to and how greatly they have improved in their ability to follow spoken German. (The participants are sworn to refrain from using English during the interviews except for offering occasional translations of individual key words.) It is gratifying to see how comfortable most of the students become with the assignment and how much real exchange of information and opinion goes on. In other words, there is a real attempt at communication here, so the

motivation for performing in the language is at an unusually high level. For their part, the Austrians are eager to participate in this activity, and they give it a high rating in their end-of-session evaluation. The instructor does need to keep a close watch on the written summaries the American students turn in on each of the interviews, however, because of the tendency some of the Austrians show to take pity on their struggling partners and offer them substantial aid at this juncture. A brief word to the overly helpful students and a reminder to the American participants can nip this in the bud.

Other campuses that host students from abroad in sufficient numbers can reap similar benefits from such an arrangement, as long as there can be coordination of efforts at both the planning and execution stages, and provided there is interest and enthusiasm on both sides. Of great encouragement at Miami University is the indication from business faculty that many (estimated at 90%) of the summer seminar abroad participants become keenly aware of their lack of communication skill in another language. As that word spreads, there should be an increased interest in prior language preparation. Since in the summer of 1988 there will be such a seminar going to Vienna, it is hoped that some of the contacts students have made here will prove beneficial over there.

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